DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 410 748 FL 024 687

AUTHOR Ubadigbo, Fidelis N.
TITLE English as a Second Language: An Educational Overview for Multicultural and Bilingual West African Students.
PUB DATE 1996-00-00
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual English as a Second Language/Bilingual Conference (10th).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Bilingualism; Comparative analysis; Cultural Awareness; Cultural Pluralism; Elementary Secondary Education; *English (Second Language); Foreign Countries; French; Higher Education; *Language Role; Language Variation; *Literacy; Second Language Instruction; Sex Bias; Standardized Tests; Teacher Education; Vocational Education; Womens Education
IDENTIFIERS Africa (West); United States

ABSTRACT

This paper describes cultural and educational characteristics of West African countries that may have implications for West Africans studying and learning English in the United States. Countries discussed include Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Benin, Niger, Gambia, Senegal, Cote d'Ivoire, and Mali. The structures of the systems of elementary, secondary, vocational, and postsecondary education are outlined, focusing on commonalities in British-colonial and francophone countries, standardized testing, progression through educational levels, patterns leading to advanced degrees, types of institutions, literacy rates and patterns, schooling rates, female schooling and literacy, and uses of English. Numerical data on schooling and literacy are included. Charts detailing the structures of the Nigerian and United States systems of education are provided for comparison, and some comparisons are made with the United States within the text. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

English as a Second Language: An Educational Overview for Multicultural and Bilingual West African Students

ED 410 748

Paper presented at the 10th Annual English as a Second Language/Bilingual Conference

by

Dr. Fidelis N. Ubadigbo

FL024687

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Fidelis N. Ubadigbo

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC).

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

English as a Second Language: An Educational Overview for Multicultural and Bilingual West African Students

In this presentation, you will learn the cultural and educational differences between West African countries and United States; ESL as it affects the ability of West African students to learn and study English in the United States; the bilingual capabilities and the multicultural inhibitors affecting the performances of students; the effect of limited exposure of students to English in relation to admissions to American institutions of higher learning; and the exploration of the West African language patterns that inhibit understanding of English as a second language.

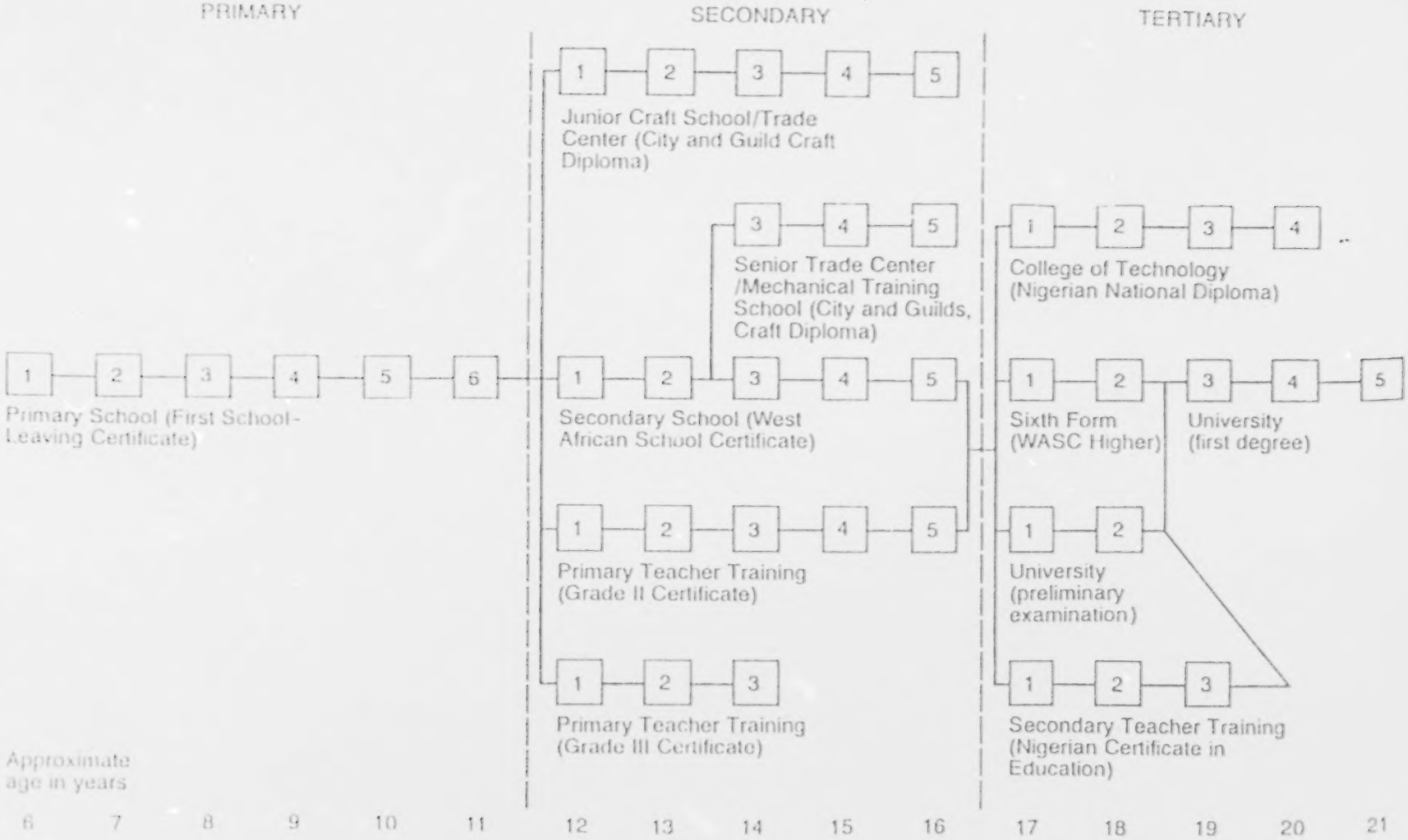
The West African countries of Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Benin, Niger and Gambia have maintained the British system of Education. Except for the French-speaking countries of Senegal, Cote d'Ivoire, and Mali, the educational systems of English-speaking countries consist of pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary. Nigeria, one of the West African countries has school system from preprimary through kindergarten including privately owned nurseries.

The primary education lasts for six years under the universal primary education (UPE) scheme. At the end of the sixth year, a student will take the First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC) examination administered by the state ministries of education. Subjects taught in primary schools include reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, history, nature study, hygiene, religion, physical education, handicraft, and arts.

On acquiring the FSLC, a student will sit for the common entrance examination administered by the West African Examination Council (WAEC). All successful students pursuing secondary careers will be placed in secondary schools of their choice to start programs lasting five years (form one through form five). At the end of the fifth year, all West African students (except those from Francophone countries) will take the West African School Certificate (WASC) administered by WAEC.

Other students may prefer to pursue a different career in the Junior Craft Schools/Trade Centers to obtain the City and Guild Craft Diploma. The majority of students may enter the primary teacher training schools to obtain the Grade II Certificate at the end of the fifth year. Yet another group may stay for only three years to obtain the Grade III Certificate. Those who entered secondary schools may switch over to Senior Trade Centers at the end of the third year to obtain the City and Guild Diploma.

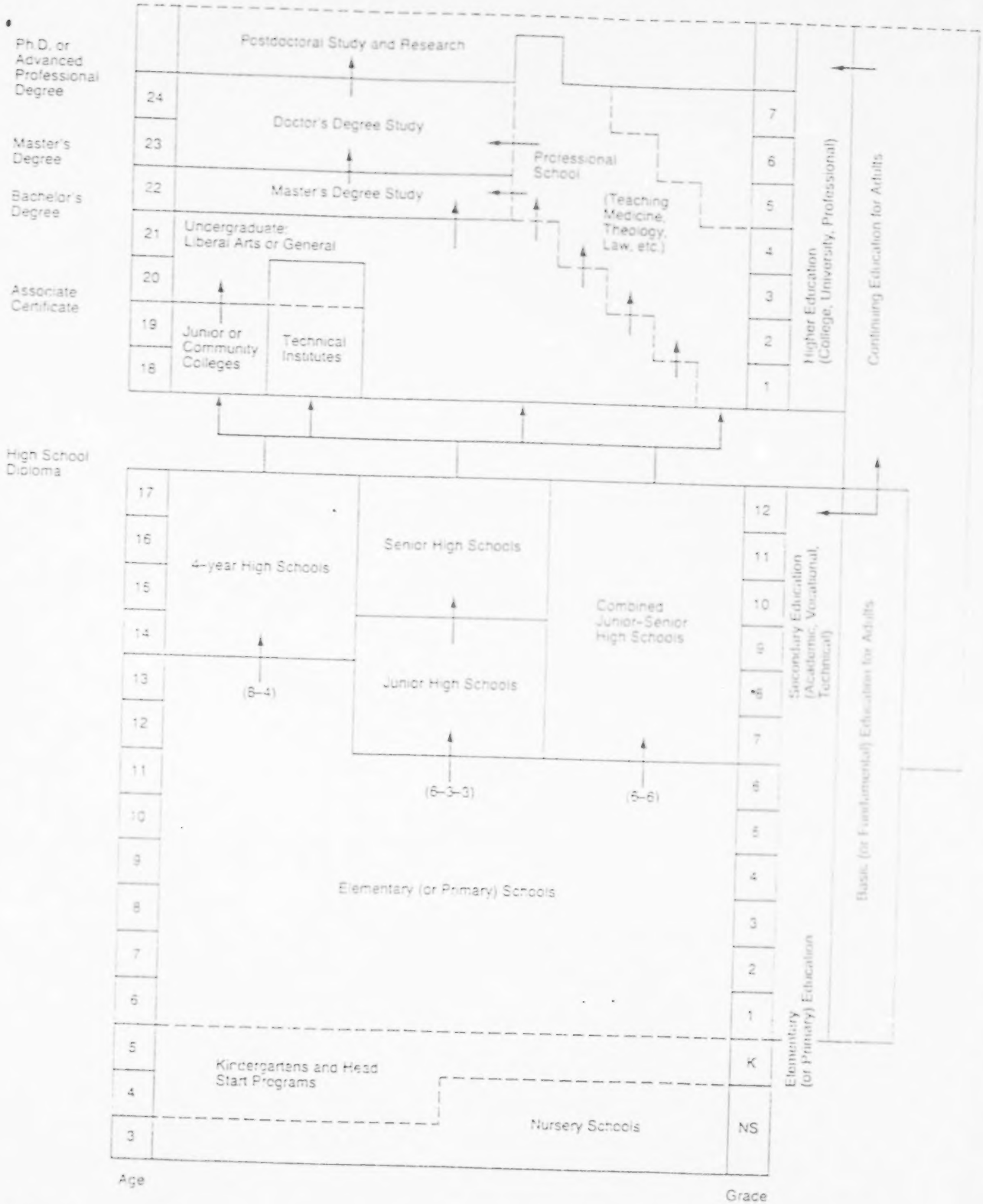
The Education System of Nigeria (simplified)


PRIMARY
SECONDARY
TERTIARY
1 2 3 4 5 6
Primary School (First School-Leaving Certificate)
1 2 3 4 5
Junior Craft School/Trade Center (City and Guild Craft Diploma)
3 4 5
Senior Trade Center /Mechanical Training School (City and Guilds, Craft Diploma)
1 2 3 4 5
Secondary School (West African School Certificate)
1 2 3 4 5
Primary Teacher Training (Grade II Certificate)
1 2 3
Primary Teacher Training (Grade III Certificate)
1 2 3 4
College of Technology (Nigerian National Diploma)
1 2 3 4 5
Sixth Form (WASC Higher)
University (first degree)
1 2
University (preliminary examination)
1 2 3
Secondary Teacher Training (Nigerian Certificate in Education)
Approximate age in years
6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21

World Education Encyclopedia, Vol. I, II, III.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Structural Patterns in Systems of Education



World Education Encyclopedia, Vols. I, II, III.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

On the tertiary level, higher education is entirely a federal responsibility and administered through the National Universities Commission (NUC). Admissions to universities is by competitive examination: Students with West African High School Certificate (WAHSC) or General Certificate of Education (GCE) advanced level are admitted directly into degree courses. The rest will take the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board examination to be admitted into the universities.

In contrast, the United States educational system rests on each state as the primary unit and state legislatures have the final authority over education. The presecondary education in the United States comprises three cycles: preprimary (nursery and kindergarten), elementary school, and middle school.

In the preprimary, the nursery is primarily in the private nursery schools. The kindergarten is in public schools as well as the Head Start Program designed to assist youngsters from disadvantaged neighborhoods obtain a wide range of preschool learning experiences. The primary education may consist of six or eight grades to educate children from the age of 6 through 12 or 14.

The middle school, is generally grades seven, eight, and nine. It is usually a transitional school to educate early adolescents from the age of 12 through 14. The course work is very much specialized to relate closely to student's interest, aptitudes, and skills.
The secondary education starts at the age of seven or nine. In the 8-4 plan, students pursue grades one through eight in the elementary school and grades nine through 12 in a secondary school. All secondary school programs lead to the high school diploma.

In higher education, there are three main kinds of degree-granting institutions in the United States: the two-year community or Junior, college; the four-year undergraduate college; and the university. The types of degree awarded divides the universities into doctoral, comprehensive, general baccalaureate, and specialized institution. Admissions into higher education hinges on four major criteria: secondary school grades and successful completion of secondary school courses; scores on certain nationally administered achievement and aptitude tests; recommendations from higher school teachers; and interviews with the college admission officers.

The problems of multicultural and ESL students from West African countries (WAC) have not received the desired attention from American institutions of higher learning. The nature of the educational system governs the level of English proficiency as well as the command and understanding of English language.

Table 1. Country, population, percentage of children in school, and literacy rates (World Education Encyclopedia Vol. I,II,III).

Country		Percentage of Children in School			Literacy Rate
	Population (million)	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	
Nigeria	91.2	98.0	16.0	1.8	51.0
Senegal	8.2	48.0	12.0	2.5	10.0
Sierra Leone	4.5	40.0	13.0	0.6	21.0
Cote d'Ivoire	13.5	76.0	20.0	2.2	45.0
Ghana	16.2	76.0	34.0	1.3	60.0
Benin	5.0	62.0	16.0	1.0	28.0
Niger	8.1	23.0	45.0	0.2	28.0
Mali	8.6	27.0	9.0	0.3	25.0
United Kingdom	57.8	100.0	83.0	20.2	99.0
United States	256.6	N/A	N/A	N/A	99.5**

Table 1 shows the percentage of school children in public school from English speaking countries. The educational systems have English as the language of instruction. In such countries, teaching English as a second language has its setbacks since the language after school is the vernacular, the native language. English as a second language poses more problems for students whose language of instruction is French. These students have problem in expressing themselves and they have difficulties in written and spoken English.

Most West African students are bilingual and most were raised in a multicultural environment. The educational systems are patterned to reflect those of the colonial countries. The uniqueness of the West African Educational systems is that countries merged together at the end of the secondary education to take one common examination administered by the West African Examination Council (WAEC).
The grade made by each student at the end of the five-year secondary career, determines the educational pathway for that student.

In Table 2, the country, population (in millions), the percentage of females in school, and the literacy rates are presented. In all the countries, the literacy rates are too low when compared to the western countries like the United States. The proportion of females who are in schools are low in all the countries. Such information will assist educators to identify students by countries of origin, their educational system, and how best to transfer and articulate what they have learned in their native countries toward a successful career in the United States. Grouping all students from West African countries together complicates and frustrates students from English speaking countries. This lack of sensitivity among educator deters progress among students.

Table 2. Countries, population, percentage of female in school, and literacy rates (World Education Encyclopedia Vol.I,II,III).

Country	Population (million)	Percentage of females children in School			Literacy Rate
		Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	
Nigeria	91.2	43.0	32.0	15.0	51.0
Senegal	8.2	40.0	34.0	19.0	10.0
Sierra Leone	4.5	28.0	33.0	16.0	21.0
Cote d'Ivoire	13.5	39.0	28.0	18.0	45.0
Ghana	16.2	44.0	38.0	22.0	60.0
Benin	5.0	39.0	8.0	N/A	28.0
Niger	8.1	N/A	N/A	N/A	28.0
Mali	8.6	36.0	28.0	11.0	25.0
United Kingdom	57.8	48.0	49.0	37.0	99.0**
United States	256.6	49.0	49.0	52.0	99.5**

Although students from Nigeria, Ghana, and Sierra Leone start learning English language from the age of five or less, their bilingual and the multicultural environment enable them to develop different uses of English language and different pronunciation of English words. The native vernacular sometimes inhibits the correct pronunciation of letters in the English alphabets.

The interchangeable use of "l" and "r" could be found among the Southern Ibos in Nigeria. The difficulties in pronouncing "H" in written statements posses a problem for Yoruba students from the Western part of Nigeria. The pronunciation of "the" has been a universal problem for all West African students. The difficulties increases when differences in sound may be the determining factor. In Ibo language, "EGBE," may mean one of these:

1. Kite
2. Gun
3. Crawl

Another one "AKWA" may mean one of these:

1. Cloth
2. egg
3. bed
4. crying

Another problem is the accent. Due to the difficulties in pronunciation of letters, the natural tendency in the United States is to lean very close to students during conversations. In extreme cases, the discussion is cut short because of the repetition of words. In extreme cases the teachers assume that a student has finished the statement before he or she even starts. This is unique to American teachers, especially those who have not intermingled with foreign students from West Africa.

Gender plays a vital role in the educational systems of West African countries. Table 2 shows the proportion of females in the schools. This ratio of male to female in schools affects the learning capabilities of the underrepresented. As shown in the Table 2, females who attend schools are less when compared to the proportion of males who attend schools in each country.

Some cultural implications include whether a student is male or female. English as a second language may be more of a task for girls from cultures where males are favored to attend school more often than females. Staying at home makes girls more fluent in vernacular and less proficient in English. In most cultural settings, males are sent to school so that they will take over some of the major responsibilities in the households.

Records have shown that students from West Africa countries must take Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) no matter how educated or how fluent he/she is in English language. This decision affect the proportion of female to male who gained admission to United States universities. On reaching the States, there will be no provision in any of the institutions to assist these students. Students from other countries have the opportunities of having bilingual teachers to help them sort things out especially in the first few weeks of their arrival.

Educating these students will take the understanding of where the students came from including the gender gap which may have militated against their understanding of English. This will help them to build their vocabularies in English. Students from French speaking West African countries find it even more difficult during their transition.

Another militating factor is that students from English speaking West African countries are exposed to the "West African English," a combination of English language and a native vernacular generally called "pidgin English or broken English." This form of English inhibits the use of proper English during conversations.

Bibliography

Arthur Schlesinger, 1994. The World Almanac and book of Facts. World Almanac, Mahwah, New Jersey.

World education Encyclopedia. 1988. Edited by George Thomas Kurian. Facts On File Publications. New York, Oxford, England.